

# Interim Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools & Childcare Programs

Fall 2022

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# INTRODUCTION

This guidance provides schools and childcare facilities in Dane County with tools to limit the impact of COVID-19 on the health and safety of children and staff, while still prioritizing in-person learning.

Schools and childcare programs are important aspects of Dane County and its communities because they offer safe spaces for children to grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Schools and childcare also provide crucial services, such as meal programs, mental health services, and extracurricular activities. In-person learning environments benefit parents and families as well by allowing caregivers the opportunity to work while children attend school or childcare.<sup>1</sup>

With high vaccination rates in Dane County and the availability of vaccinations for school-aged and young children, the risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 has significantly declined since the beginning of the pandemic. Some children and staff members may still be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 due to age, underlying health conditions, and social inequities.<sup>2,3</sup> Consider these factors when applying the strategies outlined in this document to different facilities and classrooms.

We developed this guidance from information provided by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#) (DHS), and the [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#) (DPI).

## COVID-19 INFECTION PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR ROUTINE SCHOOL & CHILDCARE OPERATIONS

Schools and childcare programs should implement the following practices regularly during day-to-day operations to limit the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

### Encourage COVID-19 Vaccination

Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible children, as well as teachers, staff, and household members, is the most critical strategy to ensure the continuity of operations among schools and childcare programs.

Anyone 6 months and older is eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. Schools can promote vaccinations among teachers, staff, families, and eligible students by providing information about COVID-19 vaccination, encouraging vaccine trust and confidence, and establishing supportive policies and practices that make vaccination as easy and convenient as possible. See the CDC's page on [Promoting COVID-19 Vaccines for Children & Teens](#) for more resources.

### Keep Sick Children & Staff at Home

Children, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of any infectious illness should stay home. Staying home when sick with COVID-19 is essential to keep infections out of schools and prevent spread to others. If a person develops symptoms of COVID-19, they should [get tested](#). To determine who should be excluded from in-person school or childcare, see the [COVID-19 Health Screening](#) handout in this guidance. For more information on staying home when sick with COVID-19, see the [Isolation](#) section of this guidance and the CDC's page on [Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#).

## Improve Ventilation

Improving ventilation can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. Circulating fresh outdoor or filtrated air within the facility helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. Open multiple doors and windows (weather permitting), use child-safe fans to increase the circulation of outdoor air, or make changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems. See the CDC's page on [Ventilation in Schools and Childcare Programs](#) for more information.

## Encourage Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette

Handwashing is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. When handwashing is not an option, provide hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Hand sanitizers should be stored out of reach of young children and children under 6 years of age should only use them with adult supervision. Model and practice respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) to decrease spread of illnesses, including COVID-19. Staff should monitor and reinforce those behaviors and provide adequate, easily accessible hand hygiene supplies.

## Clean Spaces at Least Once a Day

Cleaning once a day is generally sufficient to remove potential COVID-19 virus particles and other germs that may be on surfaces. Childcare programs should follow the [Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Guidance](#) provided by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

# ADDITIONAL PREVENTION MEASURES FOR HIGH COVID-19 COMMUNITY LEVELS & FACILITIES WITH ACTIVE OUTBREAKS

The CDC tracks [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) and provides recommendations on prevention measures based on if a community is Low, Medium, or High. These levels are informed by three factors within each county: the 7-day average of new COVID-19 cases, the number of hospital admissions due to COVID-19, and the percentage of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients.

We recommend the following prevention measures when Dane County is experiencing a High COVID-19 Community Level. However, you may also use these additional prevention measures when your facility has an outbreak or active transmission of COVID-19. For continuity of operations, you may choose to continue using these additional prevention measures when Dane County moves from a High to Medium COVID-19 Community Level. You may choose to remove these measures after several steady weeks at the Medium level or if the COVID-19 Community Level moves to Low.

## Masking

Properly wearing a high quality, well-fitting mask reduces the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus. Different [types of masks](#) can offer the wearer increased protection against getting sick.

- **When Dane County's community level of COVID-19 is High:** We recommend universal masking for all teachers, staff, and children over the age of 2 in indoor settings, regardless of vaccination status.
- **When Dane County's community level of COVID-19 is Medium or Low:** Universal masking is not required, but anyone who chooses to wear a mask should be supported in their decision to do so.

- **When a child or staff member has been exposed to COVID-19:** We recommend that anyone who is a close contact to someone with COVID-19 wear a mask for 10 days after their exposure. See [Special Considerations for Those Who Cannot Safely Wear a Mask](#), such as children under the age of 2 or people with certain disabilities.
- **When a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19:** They should [isolate](#) at home for at least 5 days. Once they meet the [criteria](#) to be released from isolation, they may return to school or childcare but should wear a mask around others through the 10<sup>th</sup> day after their symptom onset (if they never developed symptoms, they should mask through the 10<sup>th</sup> day after their positive test was collected). If unable to safely wear a mask when around others (e.g., children under 2 or people with certain disabilities), they should continue to isolate at home for 10 days.

If a child or staff member at the facility is immunocompromised, the school or childcare program may choose to implement universal masking regularly during day-to-day operations in the classroom or during indoor activities to protect those at risk for severe illness and ensure equitable access to in-person learning environments for all children.

### Special Considerations for Those Who Cannot Safely Wear a Mask

CDC does not recommend that children younger than 2 years old wear a mask, and it may be difficult for very young children or for some children with disabilities to wear a mask safely. Since CDC no longer recommends quarantine for people exposed to someone with COVID-19, we recommend your facility take additional precautions. This includes but isn't limited to: increased ventilation, universal masking among their group or classroom, and screening testing among their group or classroom. Parents and guardians who choose to quarantine their child at home after an exposure should be supported in their decision to do so.

## Testing

### Diagnostic Testing

Offer or encourage diagnostic testing to any child or staff member who has symptoms of COVID-19 or was exposed to someone with COVID-19 and it has been at least 5 days since their exposure. Encourage staff or parents and guardians of children reporting a positive home test to your facility to seek follow-up testing at a [clinic or community testing site](#). Encourage them to [report their COVID-19 home test results to Public Health](#).

### Screening Testing

Screening testing identifies people with COVID-19 who do not have symptoms or known exposures. At the High COVID-19 Community Level, consider implementing screening testing, particularly for high-risk activities (e.g., contact sports, band, choir) and after large events (e.g., sporting events, school dances) or extended breaks from class (e.g., beginning of the school year, after winter break).

See the DHS webpage on the [K-12 School Testing Program](#) for more information about testing options within school settings.

## RESPONDING TO A COVID-19 CASE AT THE FACILITY

If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, notify us:

- Through the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS)
- By contacting the facility's assigned Site Investigator
- By calling us at (608) 266-4821 and asking for the Communicable Disease Nurse on-call.

- Our voicemail is confidential, so if you leave a message, include your facility's name and contact information and the case's name and date of birth.
- Childcare programs may also use this [online survey](#) to report cases.

You **do not** need to report cases that were solely excluded for having COVID- or flu-like symptoms; only cases with positive tests collected at the facility or positive at-home tests should be reported to us. If a case does not live in Dane County, you can still report the case via WEDSS or by calling the individual's [local health department](#). By reporting the case in WEDSS, the case will be referred to the individual's local health department.

We receive notification of all positive cases within Dane County, except people who have a positive at-home test. When an individual tests positive at a testing center, pharmacy, or health care center, their health care provider, testing center, or Public Health Madison & Dane County will notify them of their test result and provide isolation instructions.

Unfortunately, we may not be able to follow up with all individuals who test positive. We send out a link via text message to the COVID-19 Case Questionnaire to all clients that have a valid cell phone number on file. This questionnaire asks about the individual's illness, as well as any work, school, or activities they may have attended where they could have been exposed or possibly exposed others. A person must be 18 or older to complete this survey, so children must have a parent or guardian complete it for them. If a case attended in-person instruction while infectious in **K-12 school settings only**, we will notify the school through secure email. In other childcare facilities, we will contact the facility when necessary.

If a parent, guardian, or staff member reports a positive at-home test to the facility, encourage them to [report their results to us](#). Any person who tests positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms of COVID-19 should follow the isolation guidelines below. See the [COVID-19 Health Screening](#) handout in this guidance for more information.

## Isolation

Children and staff with symptoms of COVID-19 should stay home and be tested for COVID-19. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, regardless of whether they have symptoms (including people who are waiting on test results), must:

- Isolate at home for at least 5 days (symptom onset being day 0 OR specimen collection date being day 0 for those that do not have symptoms).
  - They may return to school or childcare on day 6 or later if they have been fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications for 24 hours AND have had improvement of other symptoms.
- Wear a high quality, well-fitting mask through day 10\* when around others.
  - If unable to safely wear a mask when around others (e.g., children under 2 or people with certain disabilities), the individual should continue to isolate at home for 10 days\*.
  - Avoid high-risk activities where they cannot wear a mask (e.g., band, swimming) until after day 10.
- If a person develops symptoms after testing positive, the 5-day isolation period should start over (symptom onset being day 0).

\* If the child or staff member has access to antigen tests, they may be able to remove their mask sooner than day 11 (or return to the facility sooner than day 11 if unable to safely and consistently wear a mask). See our [Using Testing to End Masking After Isolation](#) webpage and the CDC's [Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#) page for more information.

## Broad Exposure Notification

In accordance with CDC, we no longer recommend individual contact tracing and notification by schools and childcare facilities. Instead, consider sending letters or emails to staff and families when a case is identified at the school or childcare program. Depending on the size of the facility and the movement of children between rooms, the exposure notification letter could be sent to a specific group, classroom, or to the entire facility. See the [example template letter](#) in this guidance.

### What to do if Exposed

Children and staff who have a suspect or confirmed exposure to someone with COVID-19 within or outside of the facility should take the following precautions:

- Wear a high quality, well-fitting mask through the 10<sup>th</sup> day after exposure when around others (with the date of last contact being day 0); see [Special Considerations for those who cannot Safely Wear a Mask](#), such as children under the age of 2 or people with certain disabilities.
  - Avoid high-risk activities where they cannot wear a mask (e.g., band, swimming) until after day 10.
- Get tested on day 5 after exposure or later OR as soon as symptoms develop.
- If positive, isolate away from others immediately.
- Continue to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 through day 10.
  - Isolate and get tested if any symptoms develop; see the [COVID-19 Health Screening](#) handout in this guidance for a list of symptoms.

For additional information on exposure, please see our [What to do if You are Sick or Possibly Exposed](#) webpage.

# APPENDIX I: RESOURCES & REFERENCES

## References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, August 11). *Factors That Affect Your Risk of Getting Very Sick from COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/risks-getting-very-sick.html>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, August 11). *Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-childcare-guidance.html>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, July 28). *Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

## Resources

- [CDC: Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#)
- [CDC: Resources to Promote COVID-19 Vaccines for Children & Teens](#)
- [CDC: Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#)
- [CDC: Ventilation in Schools and Childcare Programs](#)
- [CDC: COVID-19 by County](#)
- [CDC: Types of Masks and Respirators](#)
- [DHS COVID-19: K-12 Schools](#)
- [DHS COVID-19: K-12 School Testing Program](#)
- [DPI: COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation Measures for Wisconsin Schools 2022/2023](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting in Child Care Settings](#)
- [PHMDC: What to Do if You are Sick or Possibly Exposed](#)

# APPENDIX II: COVID-19 HEALTH SCREENING CHECKLIST

The purpose of this checklist is to help staff, parents, and guardians decide when children and staff should be excluded from school, childcare, or other activities.

[Download fillable version of this checklist](#)

<b>Step 1: Testing</b>	Yes	No
Has the individual tested positive for or been diagnosed with COVID-19 by a health care provider in the last 10 days*?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <b>If YES, the individual should isolate at home.</b>		

<b>Step 2: First Symptom Check</b>	Yes	No
In the past 24 hours, has the individual had any of these symptoms (new or different from what they usually have <sup>†</sup> )?		
• Cough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Loss of sense of taste or smell	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Shortness of breath/trouble breathing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• New confusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <b>Persistent pain or pressure in the chest</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <b>Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <b>Inability to wake or stay awake</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <b>If YES to any of the above, the individual should isolate at home and be tested for COVID-19; if yes to any of the symptoms bolded in red, call 911.</b>		

<b>Step 3: Second Symptom Check</b>	Yes	No
In the past 24 hours, has the individual had any of these symptoms (new or different from what they usually have <sup>†</sup> )?		
• Fever >100.4 °F and/or chills <sup>‡</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Sore throat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Runny nose and/or nasal congestion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Nausea and/or vomiting <sup>‡</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Fatigue (feeling overly tired)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Muscle aches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Headache	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Diarrhea <sup>‡</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <b>If YES to two or more of the above, the individual should isolate at home and be tested for COVID-19.</b>		

\* Individual may be able to return after 5 days if able to consistently wear a high quality, well-fitting mask.

<sup>†</sup> When considering symptoms, determine if they are “new and different” from how the individual usually is, taking into account any symptoms they normally have every day (e.g., runny nose or congestion due to allergies).

<sup>‡</sup> Fever, vomiting, and diarrhea - alone or together - should exclude a person from school, childcare, or work.

# APPENDIX III: TEMPLATE EXPOSURE NOTIFICATION LETTER

[Date]

Dear parent or guardian,

This letter is to notify you that your child may have been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19 at [school/program].

## **Next Steps**

Have your child wear a high quality, well-fitting mask when attending [school/program] and when around others for the next **10 days**. If your child is unable to safely wear a mask due to their age (under the age of 2 years) or a disability, contact [school/program] so they can take additional precautionary measures in the classroom. Monitor your child for the symptoms listed below and keep them home if any symptoms develop. Your child should be tested for COVID-19 at least 5 days after they were exposed or as soon as they develop symptoms.

## **About COVID-19**

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a coronavirus. It spreads from person to person through droplets created when we cough, sneeze, talk, sing or laugh. Most people—especially young people—who get COVID-19 have mild illness, similar to having a cold or the flu. However, in others it can cause severe illness, such as pneumonia. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever (temperature 100.4°F or higher)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Muscle/body aches
- Congestion or runny nose
- Headache

**For more information on COVID-19, see Public Health Madison & Dane County's website:**

[publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus](https://publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus)

## **Prevent Further Spread**

The following guidelines will help to prevent further spread of illness at [school/program]:

- Notify [school/program] if your child tests positive for COVID-19.
- Keep children home from [school/program] if they are sick.
- Keep yourself and your family up to date on [COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters](#).
- Encourage good habits (frequent handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, using masks in indoor public spaces in areas of Medium or High COVID-19 [community levels](#)).

If you have any questions, please call [full name and position] at [phone #].

Sincerely,

[Print name, Title]